

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER.

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PART II. PHOEBE'S FATHERS.

CHAPTER X. THE BEGINNING OF PHOEBE DOYLE.

THINK how things had gone with Phoebe from the beginning; and ask if they must not have been like a dream—like a page torn out from the second, that is to say the most bewilderingly complicated, volume of one of her familiar story-books, and applied to herself in a way that out-dreams dreams.

She had risen in the morning without the prospect of anything more exciting than a silent conversation with that withered bush, which stood for the symbol of a dead and empty life that had to depend upon fancy for all its leaves and blossoms, until fancy itself, from overwork, should become even more barren and sapless than reality.

She had to conjure a ruler of nations out of a pot-house orator, a hero of romance and liberty out of a thread-bare fiddler, and a mysterious heroine out of herself; and though it was all easy enough at present, she could not, in her heart of hearts, expect the soil on which she and her bush stagnated together to give them food for new sap every day—rainy days and all.

Quite enough little things had lately happened to make the freshly tasted excitement of something in the shape of real food a sort of second necessity. It was as yet no less easy than it had always been to feast on fancies, but she had tasted the salt of real looks and of real words, and this had made the flavour of unsalted fancies feel pointless and poor.

It was thus she had begun her day.

By nightfall, she knew that she had given her whole self to Stanislas Adrianski; before night the mystery of her life had been unveiled.

Stanislas Adrianski had, in his knightly and masterful fashion, wooed and won, not Phoebe Burden, a struggling law-clerk's foster-foundling, but Phoebe Doyle, the acknowledged daughter and heiress of a rich stranger who had, at last, come back from beyond the seas to do justice and to find and claim his own.

And yet, dreamlike as it ought to have been, it was all mere right and natural to Phoebe than a commonplace flirtation in a ball-room would have been to ninety-nine girls in a hundred. Phoebe was the hundredth girl. If the veil had been torn from the mystery of her birth to show her, standing within the shrine of home-love, some mere grocer or market-gardener, or any other honest but uninteresting person, she would have thought it strange, and have preferred the enjoyment of an unbroken and undiminished mystery.

It was at any rate something not utterly rapid and ignominious to be the adopted daughter and confidante of a chief of associated Robespierres, whose taste for tea and shrimps was merely a great man's foible, and would therefore, as such, fill a respectable corner of the world's history in time to come.

She had already read "Shrimps, His Liking for, page four hundred and seventy-three," in the uncompiled index to an unwritten biography of Horatio Collingwood Nelson. But the story that parted her old life from her new did not seem to her strange at all.

"We call her Phoebe—because it is not her name."

These were the first words of which her ears were conscious when she came downstairs from her bedroom, and felt, with her only too quick and ready instinct—as quick and ready as a flight of fancy—that the distinguished-looking stranger of middle age and with the big beard, whose acquaintance she had already made, held the key to the secret of her birth and destiny. So they had been talking about her. Who was she? What was she to be?

"So!" said he. "So this is the child who has been thrown upon charity by her own people, and whom charity has forgotten. I don't blame you, Mr. Nelson," he said with a certain contemptuous indifference in his tone, not thinking it worth while to express his opinion of a man whom he had mentally convicted of a mean lie to cover a petty fraud. "You have done more than your duty——"

"Pray don't mention it," said the admiral. "It is what England expects of every man."

"And so you have doubtless expected more than your pay. It is not right you should lose——"

"Ah! If every man," said the admiral modestly, "if every man had his deserts, as I always say——"

"And so you shall not lose."

Here, he felt and knew now, was he, after a long, lonely, weary term of exile, undertaken and (till habit and success had hardened and warped it into other grooves) maintained for this very girl's sake, returned to find himself alone true to a compact which he had been taking for the one link that bound him to his fellow men. Lawrence would have allowed him no right to feelings too fine to be measured by gold.

But it may well be that even a usurer has depths beyond the reach of the philosophy of the very cleverest of young men. He knew—none else can guess—what that compact had come to mean to him. He himself had never known what it had meant till now, when he found how little it had meant to other men, whom it had never cost a moment's struggle against self or a single act of self-denial.

It was for a chance promise made to a chance baby-girl that he had performed the miracle of changing his nature, whether for good or for ill. Whatever the means, it was for that baby-girl's sake that he had ceased to be whatever he had been, and had become whatever he had become; as much and as truly for her sake as other

men crush themselves, with loving goodwill, under the lighter labours that have wives and children for their comfort, and the welfare of wives and children for their ample reward. If it had not been for the one duty of sending a few pounds a year to England, what would his life in India have been? It had been lived alone; but, save for this seeming nothing, it would have been lived absolutely, unsurpassably alone. And now it all turned out to have been a stupid blunder. Nobody else concerned had cared a straw about the matter, and he had bothered with throwing away so much capital—so his reason, ashamed as usual of his heart, chose to put it—to help a silly knave to pay his rent and to stave off the reprisals of a gas company; perhaps, and probably, to save the expense of a cook and housemaid. The lost capital had not been much, it is true, but the principle was the same.

"And we, calling ourselves, some of us, gentlemen, have united together only to make a present of this child's life to that fellow, who is evidently only just saved from being a whole rogue by being more than half a fool," he thought to himself, while bending his eyes upon Phoebe in such wise as, without meaning her to be aware of their gaze, to make her feel less excited than confused and shy. Who could he be? Ought that voice of nature, of which stories tell us so much, to command her to exclaim something or other and to fall into his open arms? It is true his arms were not open; but then, if they had been, the voice of nature was as stupidly dumb as usual. "Of course, she is only a girl, and will be only a woman," he thought on. "So, of course, no harm in particular has been done to her. But if she had been only a kitten that we had saved from drowning, we solemnly swore to do the best by her, body and life and soul, that we could; not to let her coming to grief—as of course she will—be our fault instead of her own. . . . We were bound jointly and severally, as the lawyers say. If Esdaile and Ronaine are bankrupt, and since Bassett and Urquhart repudiate, and since this fellow here does worse than either, and is not fit to bring up a sparrow, on whom does the debt fall? On me. There's no getting out of that, anyhow, twist it and look at it whichever way I will. There's only one possible thing to be done. But how? How can I, at my age, and my ways, saddle myself with the life of a girl? Why, I couldn't even meddle in the matter

without scandal—though nobody knows me, and I should say that nobody that matters a straw knows her. But then, what have I to do with scandal, or scandal with me? Here's something that must be done by someone, if only out of common honour, and there's nobody but me to do it; and——"

"I quite agree with your sentiments," interrupted the admiral. "They are such that do any man honour. I always say myself that all expenses to which a fellow-man is put in the execution of his duty should be punctually repaid. It's not the money; but it's the principle of the thing."

The admiral did not speak at all fiercely this time, but very gently and deferentially, merely saving his visitor the trouble of having to complete his own sentence, as it were.

"Of course, of course," said Doyle hastily. "I never knew anybody who didn't call money 'the principle of the thing.' They muddle the spelling a little, I suppose. So that is the girl. And so she has nobody in the place of a mother, or of a sister, nobody about her in the shape of womankind?"

Phoebe herself began to disbelieve in the voice of nature; or was the stranger only her grandfather, and does the voice of nature apply to grandfathers? He did not even appear to be taking any personal notice of her, but to be speaking of her as if she were a mere nonentity in her own history—a very undignified position for a conscious heroine to be placed in.

"I have been father, mother, brother, and sister to Phoebe all in one," said the admiral solemnly. "It has been a lofty responsibility. But it has been piously and nobly fulfilled."

"But surely she has been to school? She knows other girls of her own age?"

The admiral did not answer immediately. He could not but feel that at Phoebe's friends might expect her to have been sent to school. But then they might want to know the name of the schoolmistress, and that was a question more easy to ask than to answer.

"Well, not exactly to what you might go so far as to call, school. But——"

"She has not been to school? All the better. And her friends?"

"Friends!" exclaimed the admiral with alacrity. "Do you suppose that I, as her responsible guardian, would allow her to mix with the people about here? They

are ignorant and vulgar, sir, to the backbone. I have been her friend."

Such a speech might have roused any other man to double pity. But not Doyle.

"Strange!" he only thought. "A girl, and without mother, sister, teacher, school-fellow, or girl-friend! Why, such a girl might, in truth, become what a woman never is or has been; what a woman ought to be. If I could row in the same boat with Urquhart and Bassett by breaking my word, how could I leave a girl who, thanks to fate, has escaped from women to gain no good out of such a miraculous escape from evil? She is young, away from women; her own nature cannot surely as yet have taught her any very irreparable harm. Mr. Nelson."

"Sir."

"I am a plain dealing and plain speaking sort of man, as I dare say you see."

"And I, sir, am a ditto. There's nothing about me that isn't plain. When I say ditto, I mean ditto; nothing less, nothing more."

"Then I need say but few words. I have learned all that I need to know. That she has formed no ties except with yourself, and——" He had to beat about the bush; for it was needful that he himself should invent a romance off-hand, and his imagination, despite his having once upon a time been a hanger-on upon the skirts of literature, was neither so strong nor so quick as Phoebe's. "I said that I had undertaken to make enquiries about her on behalf of her friends and family, who have come to hear of the story of her loss—no matter how; and, as I am satisfied, so will they also be. You have not asked me anything about them, nor who they are. I will tell you all that you need know."

He was addressing vacancy, or the ceiling, as most people do who are inventing their facts as they go along. But his eyes fell, for a moment, indirectly upon Phoebe's listening face, and the sight of it inspired him, professed woman-scorner as he was, with the excitement of a new feeling that this girl was, after all, the only thing that stood to him for a phantom likeness of the purposes that other men live for, and of what they expect to find waiting for them when they come home. Had she been the plainest and commonest looking of all womankind, he felt, there was something in his long silent heart that was hungering for some of the links, for any of them, that bind a man to his kind. Honour and duty were at the summit of the wave; but who

can guess from what distance, or from what depth, a wave may come? Certainly not he.

"There was once, I am not going to tell you how or when, since my story is not my own, a man of—of good rank and position, who secretly married against his father's—and her father's—will, a girl, who—well, let it be enough that she was all they say a woman ought to be, except rich—

"Ah!" interrupted the admiral; "that was sad, to be sure. But then it is odd that her parent should have objected to the young man."

"They had their reasons, I suppose. Perhaps they were of those eccentric people who—I assure you I have known actual cases, strange as you may think it—who fancy that there are more important things than money; the young man may have been wild, or a gambler, or—who can tell? Anyhow, they married without leave, and then the young man's father, on whom he depended, quarrelled with him and cast him off, and he had to go abroad to make a living. What was worse for him, he had to leave his wife in poor lodgings in London, alone. Time went by. And—and—and when—of course you understand that letters had ceased—when he came home again it was to find that his wife was dead, and that his child had been lost in the streets of London. It had been sent out by a nurse-girl who had never returned. Everywhere he made enquiries—of the police, at the workhouses, in the hospitals," he went on, his imagination warming, as he felt his story working itself together without any too apparent flaw, "and nowhere could he obtain a clue, until he was obliged to give up his search in despair. But at last, by a curious chain of circumstances, he came to learn, from one who knew all about it at the time, your story of the lost child. Date, even to the hour, descriptions, all possible circumstances agreed. He enquired yet more closely, and to such good purpose that my own final enquiries to-night will leave not the faintest shadow of a doubt upon my—upon my friend's mind that his lost daughter has been found. But there are family reasons why secrecy as to all this past history should still be observed, and—and—why it should not be supposed that his daughter has ever been brought up in a manner unbecoming her position and—and—name. And therefore, to come to the point, will you, Mr. Nelson, besides

having the pleasure of restoring your foster child to her friends—will you undertake to breathe no word of anything you know or have ever known about Miss Burden? Will you separate yourself from her as if you had never known her? Will you consider Jane Burden—whatever her name was, as dead, and keep from all attempts to see her, or to learn her name? If so, you shall not lose; you shall have what, as you truly say, every Englishman expects—that his duty shall be well paid. You have, you say, hitherto done your duty—piously and nobly—for nothing. You shall henceforth do it yet more nobly—you shall do it for the arrears of that hundred a year for her bringing up that you tell me you have never received. . . . Yes," he thought to himself, "that has to be done too. Since they have done nothing, I must do all."

Phoebe's ears were still busy in trying to carry all she could gather of this, to say the least of it, meagre history of her birth to her mind. It was not strange to her, for she had read of such romances over and over again. They were commoner than blackberries in the land where the leaves and blossoms of her withered bay-bush grew. More, there was no need at present to understand. But she, looking towards him who had hitherto been her father, and wondering, with some new awe and inconsistent alarms, about who her real new father might turn out to be, less understood the flash of real intelligence that suddenly beamed over the admiral's face—she had never seen such a thing there, or anything like it, before. But it was only for a moment—perhaps she had misread what she had seen.

"Phoebe!" he exclaimed, in a voice pitched so high as to be almost a wail. "Come to my side—to my left side, where my heart is, and tell them all if Horatio Collingwood Nelson is the man to surrender the child of that heart for a sum that—that—in short, isn't worth his taking, and with no more security than a stranger's bare word—I mean for all the gold mines of Golconda, paid down: that's what I mean!"

It was a speech—except for a few words in the middle—after Phoebe's own heart: it was worthy, she felt, of an Associated Robespierre. What ought a true heroine to do? Should she not go at once to the side of the only father she had ever known, and refuse even coronets and diamonds with scorn? But it was no natural impulse

that called for an answer. She did not go to his side; and the moment's opportunity for heroism was gone.

"I see," said the stranger quietly. "I forgot the arrears of interest. That will come to a good deal more; but you're right. You must have that too. It's stiff to reckon off hand. Suppose we say in round numbers, for arrears and interest, two thousand guineas. As for security for the money, you shall have a cheque that will be duly honoured. I'll make arrangements for that to-morrow; and, understand, that the signature will tell you nothing, and that any enquiries you make at the bank it is drawn on will tell you nothing more. As for security for getting the cheque, seeing that Miss Burden leaves this house with me in an hour, and without leaving an address, consider that a father is not bound to pay a penny for the recovery of his child. Take a fair and just offer, or leave it; in offering it, my duty is done, and I shall advise him accordingly. No. I know what you are going to say. The father will not appear to claim his daughter in person. He will act wholly through me."

Again—though Doyle saw nothing of it—the look came into the admiral's face that would make a stranger, who only saw him for these passing moments, take him for anything but the fool that most people thought him. And yet that look did not prevent him from saying, as simply as if Doyle had not been making him an offer, which—as being without a single grain of real security, and based on no sort of sufficient proof—nobody but the most confiding of mortals could be asked to accept or even consider:

"Phœbe! Duty is duty after all. I have been a good father to you, but Heaven forbid that I should allow you to stand in my way—I mean, that I should allow myself to stand in yours, for the sake of a few paltry thousand pounds. You know I have never cared to be rich, but then there is the cause, the cause of mankind. Be a heroine, Phœbe. It is hard, my poor girl. But tear yourself away, don't cry, think of Mankind!"

"Go?" asked Phœbe. "With this—this gentleman? Now? And—and—what shall I do about my things? And—who is my father? Where is he? Ah!" she cried, struck by a sudden light; "my father—it is you! And—and," she added sadly, "if you are not, nobody is—though you don't seem like one; you have not—taken money to send me away."

It was not the least like the scene she had planned. It had all gone wrong. There had been no voice of nature; no agonies at parting; no raptures at meeting. Only a cold instinct that the Grand President of Robespierres was something of an impostor, and that story-books are something of impostors too. Nevertheless, her broken words did not sound cold. To Doyle, they seemed to ring of something real at last; and "My father—it is you!" went more deeply through him than he could tell, and struck a chord in him that was sadly strange and sweetly new.

"Your father?" said he. "Let it be so then. . . . I did not mean to say so now. . . . But—I am he. You have no other; and—never mind what you call your 'things.' Get ready anyhow, and come. Come—home."

It was the least he could say, and yet, little as it was, it was the most, too. And, though little was the most, there was something in his tone, for all its coldness, that seemed to call her as if he needed her, and to make her able to answer him in only one way.

And thus it happened that Marion Burden had died, and that Phœbe Doyle, the only child of a rich English-Indian, had come into the world. Only Stanislas Adrianski, who had missed his plighted bride from her garden for many wondering days, had been permitted to recognise, amazed, the ghost of his Phœbe in a fine lady sitting in a box at "Olga." And what should he be to Phœbe Doyle? Only a fiddler now—or a hero for ever, whatever else he might be?

Only one thing is certain: nobody as yet, not even herself, had ever known the real Phœbe. And least of all those who have looked on her and her garden life through those eyes of hers, that had so wild a way of seeing all things in forms and colours that were not their own.

IN THE SUNNY RHINELAND.

XIII.

It would have been pleasant to stop at Frankfort for a time. The place attracts, because, for one thing, it is racy of the German soil, so thoroughly German that even its foreign element assumes the pervading tone and is hardly noticeable in the general German mass. But if I am sorry to leave the place, I am not at all sorry for the cause. There is nothing unattractive

in the prospect before me—a pleasant railway journey with a charming companion—while the slight element of doubt as to our personal relations gives a kind of zest to the affair. If everything were irrevocably fixed there would be no end of doubts and misgivings; as it is, all looks couleur de rose, which is a good colour in its way, if in its nature evanescent.

The quiet stolid hotel where I am staying is not in the least put out at my sudden departure; in fact, I think I can detect a feeling of relief in the face of the melancholic waiter. Other guests arrived last night, and the waiter clearly dislikes a crowd and bustle which interfere with his studies. No fiery chariot is summoned to transport me to the station, but I depart quietly with my portmanteau, this last upon the shoulders of the odd man about the hotel, who does not, happily, wear a uniform of green and gold and call himself porter; in which case he would not condescend so far. Still, this is really a departure, I feel; I am turning my face homewards. I might, if I had time, think out an elaborate farewell to this German land of which this pleasant German city is, de jure, the capital and representative. But I have not an instant to lose. First I have to dart to the Taunus Bahnhof to meet the train from Wiesbaden, which is luckily just in time.

"I have only one piece of baggage," cries Gabrielle, with a hasty pressure of the hand.

Only one piece, indeed! but that piece the biggest slice in the way of luggage that could very well hold together.

John pokes me in the ribs playfully.

"There, my boy, you'll have to look after that for the future; I'm well out of it."

But John, too, is in a tremendous hurry, having to run round to the other platform to catch a train back again to Wiesbaden. And it is very well to be in a hurry when you have only yourself to look to; but when you are charged with such a piece of luggage as Gabrielle's, you have to get the porters to be in a hurry too, and that no money will bribe them to be. Why should they put themselves out of the way to hurry from the Taunus Bahnhof to the Neckar Bahnhof? They are all in a row; three roomy rambling stations, as much alike as so many drops of water, suggesting the query as to why they should not be all run together and amalgamated as one big Bahnhof. As it is, one is tormented by all sorts of doubts as

to being on the right track. Why should we be going to the Neckar Bahnhof? We are not going up the Neckar; I only wish we were. But then the third Bahnhof is known as the Weser, and we are still more emphatically not going down the Weser.

"And now, my friend," said Madame Reimer, putting her purse into my hand, "now that we have parted with Monsieur Jean and his grand ideas, let us travel, please, in the way that costs the least dear." Nothing could suit me better. Gabrielle was evidently likely to prove a treasure in the way of judicious economy. So third-class tickets are procured for Cologne at something like eight-and-sixpence each. But the third-class waiting-room is a long way off—so far, indeed, that doubt arises as to whether it can possibly have any communication with the railway, a doubt which is not dispelled by the aspect of the crowded room, where everybody is smoking and drinking, as if moving on were the last thing to be thought of. Indeed, it is like a new world to us, this jovial waiting-room, where bright sunshine streams upon fair and flaxen locks, upon the bright accoutrements of soldiers, upon the faded garments of peasants, with here and there a relic of national costume in the form of a bright kerchief, an umbrageous cap, or gleaming plates of gold about the temples. There is a jolly buffet, too, with flaxen-haired girls as ministering spirits, and at this buffet I can supplement my unsatisfactory complete tea with two eggs, with a jug of foaming beer, and a "bread with flesh," and get change out of threepence. Happy, jolly third-class, where one can live at third price; where there are no waiters with white napkins and white ties; and where there are no bills because nobody will give you credit! And Gabrielle owns, privately, that she has a weakness for beer—the light beer of Vienna in those tall glasses—and sips approvingly. There is no hurry, my friends, with your trains. Leave us here for a while where beards and tongues wag pleasantly, and where the fair-haired Gretchen casts mild, sympathetic glances from her soft blue eyes. But soon the spell is broken, the doors are flung open, and the assembly dissolves—soldiers tighten their buckles, emigrants gather together their belongings, and everybody marches off.

The third-class carriages are fairly comfortable; no luxuries in the way of cushions and hat-rails, but roomy and without unpleasant angles.

"Decidedly we are very well here," cries Gabrielle, settling herself in a corner. There is only one other passenger in the carriage, a man of commercial pursuits, who understands neither French nor English, so that we can talk as we please. It is a pleasant country through which we are passing. We crossed the Main just by Frankfort, and are journeying among pleasant meadows, varied by clumps of lordly trees, with the white façade of some ancestral schloss gleaming through the verdure. Apple-trees grow among the fields, and there are huge plantations of potatoes. It is quite different to Nassau, with its hills and brünnen, and its friendly simplicity. We are in Hesse Darmstadt now, and knowing nothing of its history—if it has a history to itself, that is, not a prolonged protocol—we would say that it was a lordly aristocratic country—England without its citizen life—a country of great proprietors; while here and there peasants are to be seen in droves, cultivating the fields of their lords. Passing Niederrad, there is heavy and continuous firing—troops at exercise, no doubt—but not a button of them to be seen. And then we pass through a forest of pine and beech, the silvery sheen of the one contrasting effectively with the lurid shades of the other; and then we rejoin the sparkling Main, with mountains in the background. Then, presently, we thunder over the Rhine stream itself, just where the Main loses itself in the mightier stream, the joint rivers rushing on with renewed force, while timber-rafts circle in the eddies, and steamers rush to and fro, roaring loudly in answer to the challenge of the train above. And then we are once more under the surveillance of the menacing loop-holes that seem loth to lose a chance of making mouths at peaceful passengers; and that is a sign that we are fairly within the fortified city of Mayence.

And all this time we have chatted freely—Gabrielle and I—on everything that passed, but with nothing intimate, nothing confidential, in our conversation. On the whole, perhaps a third-class carriage is not quite the place for making love in, with its constant change of occupants and disturbing incidents; and certainly not at a bustling station like Mayence, where people pour into the carriages with all the freedom of excursionists. Indeed, the passengers are mostly people of the town, who are on pleasure bent, and bound for the next station or so. And so we roll out of Mayence, with a view as we pass of the west

front of the cathedral, which does not impress the stranger, although it harmonises well enough with some quaint unwieldy street-scenery. Still, it takes an effort to see anything attractive in Mayence, and we leave it without a pang of regret, as we roll on in company once more with the swift Rhine; through a river-plain rich and varied, with vineyards showing here and there, rich groves by the river, and yellow corn-stacks shining forth from a dark background of pine-wood; charming blue hills beyond the river—hills in whose bosom lies our beloved Schlangenbad.

By-and-by we stop at Ingelheim, where Charlemagne had his palace, and watched the snow melting away from the sunny flank of the hill of Rudesheim. And here people come with trays, beer in glasses, sandwiches, and the like, and it is pleasant to quaff a goblet to the memory of the stout potentate. From Ingelheim we have only a solitary fellow-passenger, a stout infantry soldier, bluff and good-humoured, who has no small change in the way of foreign languages evidently; hence now or never is the time to say a few appropriate words to Gabrielle. But when I clear my voice to begin she is looking out of the window.

"Here is our dear Rhine again," she cried, we had been running inland for awhile, "and those bluff hills rising from the river; and there surely is Bingen where you were so suffering."

"And where you were so angelically kind," I cried, seizing her hand enthusiastically.

"Ah! but no, it was nothing, that. Confess now, would you not have infinitely preferred the charming Amy for a garde malade?"

"Indeed, no," I cried; and should have said a great deal more, but at that moment my voice was drowned in a general babel and clatter.

We were at Bingen station, and everybody seemed on the move, and to make a noise at Bingen appeared to be the whole duty of man and woman; everybody was talking at once; fruit-sellers, and wine and refreshment vendors, all eager to deal.

With a few turns of the wheel we have crossed the little river Nahe. Kreuznach is higher up the stream where the Mumms are settled, and here is Mumm himself at the Bingerbrück junction, in a white hat and gossamer suit, hurrying to catch the train for somewhere.

By the time we leave Bingerbrück our

carriage is pretty full. And now we are in the very thick of the Rhine scenery again—castles looking over the heads of castles, and vineyards disputing with each other every inch of ground whether horizontal or perpendicular, or a mixture of the two. It is the same scene, but yet quite different, seen under such different conditions; sometimes grander, sometimes softer, but always caught in hasty glimpses that are cut off altogether as the train plunges into some cool and darksome tunnel. And really the day is so hot that we enjoy the tunnels as much as anything, the tunnels and the cool cuttings in the rocks all overgrown with verdure. How we pity the unfortunate right-bankers, as we catch sight of a train on the opposite side of the river in the full blaze of the sun's rays.

But the stream itself seems to grow more familiar to us as we wind along in company. It is a tight squeeze: the river that has gathered the waters of a big slice of Europe; the railway on either hand; and two broad roads where waggons creak slowly along; roads bordered with fruit-trees, where passengers pick as they please; and all this in a narrow ravine that has made considerable difficulties in accommodating even the river. In the tightest places the railway, of course, goes to the wall—to the rock, that is—buries itself neatly in a tunnel, and comes panting to the surface further on; with a glimpse of the rushing stream between the vine-clad rocks; gay Dutch barges that seem familiar and friendly; a big crowded steamer; then more rocks and vines, and the train runs into a little station almost lost in vineyards. And the little towns on the opposite bank, with the blue-slatted roofs and white walls gleaming in the sunshine. Who lives in these snug white houses? They can't all be lodging-houses and annexes to hotels. There must be cool cellars in the rock under those houses, and casks of wine in the cool cellars. And what a happy thing to have a friend living in a white house by the Rhine, with a cool cellar and many casks of wine, and to drop in upon him on this broiling day, and sit in his garden-house in the shade, and watch the river flashing by, with a flask of the old wine that was bottled in the years of plenty! But there is no such luck in store for us. Even when we draw up opposite a pump half overgrown with foliage—a shady pump deliciously cool looking—there are no means of getting a drink. The guard—happy

man—has a teapot, which he pumps full, and then takes a refreshing draught through the spout. But the train has been waiting while the guard takes his draught, and now goes on ruthlessly.

And then the queer ancient towns that we break into, unexpectedly diving through a big gap in some ancient wall, with its watch-towers and its ramparts all overgrown with ivy or straggling vines. There are plenty of people getting in and out; artists with their load of easels, and campstools, and stretchers; and tourists who take the train here and drop it there, and are first on one bank and then on the other, vagaries which the railway company actually encourage by making their tickets available for the line on either side. And here are a lot of pretty English girls in their cool fresh garments, who have come to meet their brother, hot and tired, with the dust of London-town still on his shoes, to meet him and carry him away in triumph to the white house by the river—their home for the summer season—the grey old walls echoing their talk and laughter.

At one station—Bacharach, I think—we gain the company of an American, a dry-looking man, anxious for information.

"Now, what I want to know, mister, is what there is inside them Rhenish castles," pointing to a castle on the opposite side. "I should kinder like to know their interior fixings. Why, there's people living in 'em still."

"Exactly; the modern taste for mediævalism has led to sundry princes and others fitting up the shells of ancient castles, which could be bought at one time for an old song."

"There ain't any to be sold just now I expect, sir?" queried the American anxiously.

"Well, no; it would take a good many songs of even the finest prima-donna to buy one of those castles now."

"But what I want to get at, mister," said the American, striking one finger on the other, "is, what are them castles there fur? What are they there fur?—say. Kinder custom-houses, says one. But you don't tell me as trade could live with a custom-house every quarter mile. They'd eat each other's heads off, sir. Robber castles, says another. But you don't ask me to believe that robbers could git together all that hewn stone, and hoist it up to the top of precipices, and steal the masons to put it all together. Not in

them barbarous days, sir, when credit was in its infancy. No, sir; that castle question wants elucidating."

The American stuck to that point, and seemed to think that if he could only obtain a full and exhaustive view of all the interior fixings of a castle, he would be well on the way to solving the question himself; and with this view he got out at the next station, where he had heard of an extensive castle ready to be explored. For my own part, I had taken my fill of castles coming up on board the steamer; while from the railway the interior of the towns and the charming little churches, many of which show features of great interest, attract the attention most.

Coblentz came as a full stop to our notes of admiration; hot, baking Coblentz, with that detestable Ehrenbreitstein still acting as Dutch oven. The time-bills gave us half an hour at Coblentz, and Madame Reimer had planned a hasty drive to the burial-ground on the hill, but the train was twenty minutes late, and we should start again, we were told, in less than ten minutes. So that must be given up. And from Coblentz the line ceases to follow the curves of the river, and passes through a country which seems tame in comparison with the scenery we have left behind.

There are few passengers with us, and all Germans, and this seems to me a favourable opportunity for saying my say to Gabrielle. Her face is pensive now, and thoughtful, the long eyelashes outlined on the clear olive cheek. I begin in a voice which I mean to be tender, but which is undeniably husky.

"Gabrielle!"

She turned the full power of her dark eyes hastily upon me, with something of surprise and trouble in their expression.

"Listen," she cried quickly, without giving me an opportunity of saying more; "we have been excellent friends, have we not?" laying a hand on my sleeve, "and you have taken an interest in my troubled life. Well, would you like to hear the dénouement?"

I nodded assent, and she continued:

"It was owing something to you, monsieur; you ought to be pleased with me after the pains you have taken to soften my prejudices"—this with an appealing glance that took away any sting from the words—"but really I am ashamed to tell you"—after a long pause—"I am going to marry a German."

"Hector, of course?" I suggested moodily.

"Yes, Hector, of course," continued Madame Reimer, with an embarrassed little laugh; "he is with his sister and mother at Cologne, and he will meet me there. It was he, I found out, who had taken such care for my poor father's memory, and after that, how could I say 'No' to him?"

I suppose Gabrielle saw from my gloomy face what was really the matter with me, for she ceased talking about the future, and began to look out of the carriage window intently. Puff! my dream had vanished into thin air; it had been a kind of midsummer madness—a mere bubble of the fancy. And yet the loss of it made me angry and miserable. And Gabrielle, turning her eyes once more softly upon me, must have read what was passing in my mind.

"You are not really hurt?" she asked, laying a hand again caressingly on my arm. "How could I know?" and her voice melted into half a sob. "Why didn't you tell me in the palm garden?"

But after that she was adamant. It was all fixed and settled now; there was no going back to yesterday. And if it was distasteful to her to become even temporarily a German by marriage, yet Hector had resolved to sell his manufactory at Mulhausen, and join a firm which had once been Alsatian also, but which had established itself, since the war, at Elbœuf, the rising centre of the woollen manufacture in France.

"And we shall have a house at Rouen, monsieur, and I hope you will come and see us there."

I don't think I responded cordially to this invitation. I had become frozen, as Madame Reimer complained, and apparently immersed in Bradshaw to find the readiest means of getting away from Cologne.

By this time we had approached the river again, and a thundering "Bo-o-o" from a steamer that was making rapidly down, seemed at once a reply to the question and an invitation.

That prolonged scream could only come from one of those Netherland boats, and, indeed, I soon made her out as belonging to the line. And quickly as she was coming down the river, we should be at Cologne at least half an hour before her, and I should have just time enough to embark. I think Madame Reimer was well pleased when I imparted my plans to her, although she urged me gently to stay

a few days at Cologne. And as in a few hours we should part for good, there was no use in spending the time unpleasantly. Let us make believe that I was the successful lover, and that the other man was about to get his congé.

Madame Reimer laughed at the notion, but did not disapprove, nor rebuke me when I made tender speeches, a state of things far more pleasant than could have been expected, and that somehow seemed to correspond with the scenery. From Andernach the scene from the carriage windows was very beautiful—woods and river and richly tinted rocks making everywhere charming pictures. A German tourist had come aboard at Andernach, travel-stained and sunburnt, with a little wallet, also with a panoramic map of the Rhine, upon which he annotated as we passed the various scenes—Schön! or perhaps Wunderbar! But the poor man was sleepy in spite of his enthusiasm, and finally dropped off, and slept tranquilly for half an hour, and then took up his task where he left off, evidently under the impression that he had only closed his eyes for a moment. And so the train ran into Bonn, when our worthy German was still among the seven mountains.

At Bonn we felt that everything had come to an end. I had no more heart for tender speeches. Only there was a kind of mist before my eyes. And Gabrielle, too, looked a little sad.

"They are so tiresome, these partings," she said pettishly.

But the train darted ruthlessly on, and presently we were among the woods of Brühl, and were reminded of the imminent end of our journey by the demand for tickets.

"Oh, this is sad," cried Gabrielle, when the tickets were given up; "the last link is broken. Oh, monsieur! help me to be firm."

But I couldn't. I could only take her hands in mine, and pressing them to my lips, lose myself for a little moment in a mist of half-pleasurable regret. And with that all was at an end. We collected our belongings, separating carefully hers from mine.

"I have still something of yours, however, madame, that I shall cheerfully hand to my successor."

It was the ticket for the little piece of baggage. And madame's laugh rang out merrily enough.

And now we have cleared the woods, and over the flat cornlands rise the tall

spires of the Dom of Cologne, frosted silver against the purple sky. It is a straight run in to the city, and the driver puts on speed. It will be over all too soon, this summer day's journey. Even now, with a prolonged and demoniacal yell, the steam is shut off, speed is slackened, and we are thundering over drawbridges and rumbling between casemates, and generally running the gauntlet of cross-fires from loopholes and embrasures as we circle the strong fortifications of Cologne. A strange little railway journey that—half the circuit of the town, beneath frowning walls and stern ramparts, and peeping down into deep grassy ditches—with curves so sharp that the whole bulk of the long unwieldy train is made visible to us.

"But we are leaving Cologne behind us!" cried Madame Reimer, half in terror, thinking for the moment that I am really carrying her off to parts unknown.

But presently the train whirls suddenly to the right, and, piercing the fortifications through a strongly-guarded opening, descends slowly but irresistibly into the town. Across busy streets, where the great gates are shut and the traffic is suspended while we pass; across narrow alleys, where there is no traffic to suspend, but where knots of children collect to see us pass; right through back-yards, almost brushing against the water-butt and surprising the denizens in the midst of their occupations; peering into a cloistered churchyard, where the dead have slept undisturbed for centuries; and so, among houses and streets, the train thunders and clanks, with the cheerful noises of the town and the shouts of children accompanying it, till it glides into its own particular house, and comes gently, as if unwillingly, to a stand.

All the world is there to meet us with noise and cries, and shouts for porters and for cabs. As for Gabrielle, she is at once lost to sight in the arms of a tall and stalwart man of martial aspect, and disengages herself, blushing.

"Hector, this is monsieur who was so kind."

Sundry profound salutations, a warm pressure of the hand from Gabrielle.

I have not an instant to lose if I must catch the boat.

"But, monsieur!" cries Gabrielle in imploring accents.

Has she repented after all? No; it is the baggage ticket, which I hand to the stalwart Hector.

"It is your affair now, my friend—that minute piece of luggage."

And this time I am fairly away, without a lingering look behind, and at a pace which makes the porter who carries my portmanteau run to keep up with me.

One glance at the towers of the Dom, rising grandly above us, and then down to the pier, where I find an ominous blankness. No steamer there. Has she gone? Nobody knows. One says he thinks she has passed; another fancies she hasn't. Finally it appears that she has not been sighted yet, although some hours overdue. But that is nothing in the fruit season. She may be here any minute, or perhaps not for hours. And so I take my seat among the idlers of the quay, perched upon a commanding barrel, the bridge of boats in full view and the river beyond, for a long reach.

The heat of the day is over, and the rush of waters sounds cool and refreshing. There is plenty of life on the river: steamers hurrying up and down; the clean gaily-painted barges from Holland floating gently down; and long convoys, dragged by powerful tugs, making way slowly upwards. But no Netherlands boat. Yes, there is one, but it is coming the wrong way. And this boat, it turns out, is the one we travelled up in, John and I, and as they make fast, and people come ashore, I recognise Fritz the energetic, and the dignified conductor. And the recognition is mutual. It is like meeting with old friends on a foreign strand, and it is, perhaps, pleasanter sitting on board the steamer than upon a barrel, however elevated, especially as the barrel is going on board also. And on board I sit comfortably enough, and amused by the scenes about, till daylight fades and the stars shine out, and the young moon shows her silver bow in the skies.

The truant boat appears at last, and, once on board of her, I feel that my cares are at an end. I pick out a comfortable seat on deck, where the heaped-up fruit-baskets have left but little room; and here I mean to stay till daylight doth appear. It is a perfect summer night. As the boat slowly leaves the pier and steams down the river, and under the great lattice-bridge, the graceful towers of the cathedral gently recede, and the moon, that seems to be gliding after us through the sky, shows for a moment in silvery radiance through the fairy tracery of the further of the spires, and then settles for one

short moment between the two, perched on the very apex of the roof—a charming, fantastic sight that will never be forgotten while memory holds her sway. And then we surge swiftly down the stream, the towers and gleaming walls of Cologne fading away in the lucent gloom, and the boat feels and imparts the send and thrill of the stream, while the stars shine out in one glorious galaxy.

And here, on deck, I meant to stay all night long, not sleeping, but resting; only it occurred to me that I had eaten nothing in particular since that sandwich at Frankfurt in the morning—that morning which seemed so far distant now—and then came supper, and then no more etherealisation after that, but bottled beer and unrestricted cigars, till I was fairly overpowered with sleep.

It was chilly, too, on deck, and so I took my corner in the salon, pulling my boots off this time without hesitation, for in the other three corners were sleeping damsels, and they had pulled off their shoes—and after that, oblivion.

The Rhine awakes me in a playful manner, dashing in a handful of water through the open window.

In the night we have travelled far and fast, have passed out of the Prussian lines altogether and are in the pleasant Dutch waters. The tri-coloured baskets on the long poles are evidence of that, and the general air of homely comfort afloat and ashore.

Here is a pleasant picture, framed, in the cabin window; it is nothing in itself, trees softened by morning mist, a star, a mill, the orange glow of sunrise, the waters reflecting it; a boat, with two boys and a cat eager for fishing and full of glee, the cat especially—a black-and-white one—hardly to be restrained from jumping overboard in chase of the gleaming fish.

The barefooted damsels have departed, dropped in the night at some riverside town, Düsseldorf, or Wesel, or Emmerich the doleful, perhaps.

But still passengers come and go, early as it is, dropping in from humble little piers where it seems a condescension for our big boat to haul alongside.

Some of these Dutch women are charming. It is heresy to say it, perhaps, but they are more refined than the Germans—with more grace and manner—but then the best of them are married, and seem fond of their husbands, so that it is no use my proclaiming the truth abroad.

There is one young woman on board who pleases me mightily; she has a little boy aged two or three, and keeps him happy and amused, but she is not engrossed with him nor over-anxious. When he pitches himself headlong from chairs and tables, she just picks him up in time. There is a slight abstraction about her that does not prevent her from doing everything at the right time; and she moves graciously with the consciousness of full ability to manage everything well.

But this consciousness receives a severe shock; just now this young woman was trying for something to amuse the boy, and pulled out a key, a regular Bluebeard's key it seemed, for the face she made over it. And she who prided herself on her perfect management, especially of her husband, had actually carried away the key—evidently the master-key of the house at home: the key to the master's schnaps, to his cigars, to his orange pekoe, the key to all the other keys that are all huddled together in a little basket within.

For a moment there is dismay, and then the face brightens into a smile as she feels the humour of the situation and pictures poor Jan schnapsless, cigarless, dinnerless; and she calls for paper and envelope, and indites such a pretty little letter—I can see it is a pretty letter from the curl of the lip, and the dimple that shows on the soft full chin—and then she wraps up the key and seals all up, and dismisses it from her mind.

Jan will swear and stamp around all this livelong day; but when evening comes he will get this sweet letter and the key, and all will be peace.

But these and other figures pass away, softly floating off in boats, or dropped at neat and gaily-painted piers. I can see everything through my window, and don't care to move.

When I lift my head, I see framed, as in a picture, some pleasant riverside scene: a row of cottages with red-tiled roofs, steps leading to the river, a boat moored at foot. Through the foliage of a clump of elms the sails of a windmill are seen revolving. A ship is building close by, and the clang of hammers resounds cheerfully. And the river widens and widens, joining other rivers and throwing off branches as big as itself till the land seems afloat in the waters and the people on shore in their houses of brick a mere fraction of the people afloat in their houses of wood; and then in the midst of a big tangle of masts and rigging,

and girder bridges, and tall trees, and windmill sails, and smoke, and sunshine, gleam the red roofs and homely spires of Rotterdam.

And so farewell to the sunny Rhine. I won't take you to the Hook of Holland, where it is blowing pretty fresh, and big ships are coming in with the tide, and a long line of steamers are making out to sea. For it isn't sunny there, nor indeed am I quite sure whether it is the Rhine, or the Maas, or the Waal, or indeed any river at all, but just on an arm of the North Sea, or German Ocean as the maps have it; I should prefer to call it the North Sea. And indeed I am a little sorry to say farewell, having left a little bit of my heart in that sunny Rhineland; and have brought back nothing but memories and imaginations which are of no use perhaps to anybody but their owner. Approach the Docks, the Tower, Saint Paul's, and Ludgate Hill; and farewell, once again, to the Rhineland. Farewell to rocks, vineyards, and castles, to milk-white maids and amber wine. Bright land, farewell! And yet, as the poet observes:

There can be no farewell to scene like thine.

"LOLLA."

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

A STRANGE hard look came over the delicate young face.

"It was through her father," she said, in the same low voice that I had used. "My story is not by any means uncommon. I had been a nursery governess. I was very unhappy and very badly treated. To make matters worse, the son of my employer fell in love with me. I would not listen to him. I left my situation—he followed me. I had heard that he was wild and unsteady, but he was the only one who had ever had a kind word or look for me among them all, and I had grown to love him very dearly. It was hard to shut my ears and heart to his prayers when he found me out, and begged me to marry him. I consented at last, and for twelve happy months I envied no man or woman in all the wide earth. A year—it is not much to be happy in—not much in a whole life that was all trouble and weariness before, all bitterness and despair after. But it is all I have had or ever shall have, I suppose. After Lolla was born, he changed. He grew sulen and discontented, took to staying away from home, and came back only too often in a

state of helpless intoxication. It nearly broke my heart to see him so changed, but I did what I could for the child's sake. However, things grew worse and worse. He took to ill-treating me systematically. His associates were now low and common men, and he seemed gradually sinking into deeper and deeper degradation. We were miserably poor. We had but one wretchedly-furnished room, and what little money I could make barely kept life in my baby and me. I wonder often how I lived through two years of such a time, but my child kept life and hope within me, and for her sake I bore all. There came a night, however, when endurance was strained beyond what it could bear. He came home mad with drink. The child was asleep in bed—the one bed we possessed; he swore at me for putting her there, and then—ah! the horror of that moment!—he raised his heavy foot and kicked her out on to the stone floor. That act roused all the passion and wrath of my whole nature. For myself I had borne blows and kicks and ill-usage without complaint, but for the child—God forgive me what I said and did in my agony as I raised the little terrified creature in my arms, and tried to hush her wailing cries. I told him that I had borne with him long enough, that for the future he should never see me more, and I took my child in my arms, and went out into the cold winter streets, a creature so broken, so utterly desolate, that the tempting of the black river rushing under its gas-lit bridges was a tempting I could scarce resist. What had I to live for? The child at my breast wailed in its pain that I could not ease, and each moan struck to my heart like a knife, and filled me with fresh loathing and horror for the man who had dealt us this fresh misery. All that night I roamed the streets. I think I was scarcely in my right senses. At daybreak I found a friend—a woman compassionate enough to give me shelter, to believe my story, and to help me in my sore need. She was very poor—she kept a little shop in Chelsea—but she was a good Christian, if ever there was one, and to her I owe my safety—my life—my present occupation. I live there with her now. She procured me needlework from the shops, and, little as I earn, it just suffices to support us. I was fairly happy and at rest until—until, day by day, I saw there was something wrong with Lolla; she could no longer walk and run about as she had done; she was always tired and

languid, and complaining of pain in her hip. I took her to a doctor—he treated her for a long time, but she got no better. At last I was told to bring her here. I procured the necessary letters through the doctor's assistance, and came with her as you know, madam. That is all my story. That child is all I have that makes life of any value to me. Without her—but no, God is too merciful to rob me of my one treasure! He will—he must spare her!"

She knelt down by the little cot, her breast shaken with heavy tearless sobs, her face hidden in the white and trembling fingers that shut it from my sight. My own eyes were wet with tears of sympathy, the sad heart-broken tale had affected me deeply, even though such tales were by no means rare for me to hear.

She raised her head at last. "Please excuse me, madam," she said. "It is not often I give way, but to-night I cannot help it."

I took her poor thin hands in mine, and with what simple words I could command, I led her thoughts away from earth and its troubles, to that sure and perfect haven of rest, where life's storms and shipwrecks are remembered no more in the glory of an endless heaven.

She listened, crying softly and silently; but at last she grew more calm, and sat there by her child's bed during the long night-watch—subdued and hopeful even amidst her fears.

Lolla slept well and soundly, and at six o'clock, when her mother had to leave, she was not yet awake. I gave up my post to the sister who came to relieve me, whispered all the necessary instructions, and then left the hospital. The Nurses' Home was at the end of the grounds, about a minute's walk from the hospital itself. I went out with the poor young mother, and together we walked to the house where my room was. As we stood at the gate talking, a young man, singularly handsome and well dressed, passed by us. As his eye fell on my companion he started, coloured, paused, then approached.

She, as she saw him, turned white as death. Involuntarily her hand clutched my arm, and she trembled like a leaf.

"Mary," he said, with strange humbleness, "won't you speak to me? I have been searching for you so long."

She turned still paler, and shrank closer to me in her terror; she seemed quite unable to speak.

"I don't expect you to forgive me all in a hurry!" he continued in the same humbled voice. "God knows what a wretch I've been; but since you left me, Mary—and I knew I had driven you away—I have never had one happy hour. I have cut all my old companions and ways; I have a good situation now, and am earning plenty of money. It is a year and more since you went away, Mary. Can you forgive me? Will you believe me and trust me once more?"

Still no answer. Still that same look of shrinking—of horror.

"The child, too," he went on brokenly; "I have thought of her so often—her pretty ways, her sweet face. She is mine, too, you know, Mary. I won't force you to come back against your will; but I am so lonely, and in the long evenings I sit and think of you both, and curse the hour I ever drove you away. Mary—you used to be kind and gentle once—can't you look over the wrong I did you? I am humble enough now, you see, when I can beg your pardon before your friend. For our child's sake, Mary, will you grant it?—our child's sake!"

She found words then. A shudder shook her from head to foot, all the softness left her face. She turned from him with a gesture of loathing.

"Could you find no other plea to harden me?" she said. "For my broken heart, my ruined life, I forgive you—that is easy enough; but for my child—you are her murderer. Go, for Heaven's sake, go!"

He turned so white I thought he would faint; but he made no sign, uttered no other word, only turned and went away with uncertain steps, with the morning sunshine mocking the darkness of his own remorse as it fell on his handsome face.

I led her into the house, and I made her sit down, for she was hysterical, and then I went to fetch her some tea. When I brought it she was calm and more like herself. She drank it without a word, but when she had finished she put the cup down and looked appealingly at me.

"Have I not done right?" she asked. "Could I have acted otherwise?"

I sat down by her side and looked compassionately at her doubtful face. "My dear," I said, "I scarcely know whether to blame you or not. Your duty is to obey your husband, but I can well understand your shrinking from a renewal of such trials as you have undergone. Yet he

seemed thoroughly in earnest, and if he has given up his vicious habits, then it would be but right and generous of you to forgive the past, and, in a true womanly spirit, return to him, and strive to keep him steadfast to his present resolutions. You loved him once, did you not?"

"Yes, and I love him still," she murmured sadly. "But when I think of Lolla, it hardens me. What has my darling ever done that she should suffer for her father's crimes? If she lived—if she recovered, I might forgive him; as it is—"

Her face grew stern again; she rose abruptly. "I cannot do it," she said; "the task is beyond my strength. You do not know what my child is to me."

"But she is his child also," I said gently.

"He should have done his duty as a father when he had the chance," she answered sternly. "You are very good and kind, madam, and you have a gentle compassionate heart, but you cannot understand what I feel. If I am hard—he is to blame. I cannot forget; and when I see my child's suffering, and think of what she might have been, I cannot forgive."

And, weeping bitterly, she left me.

That day Lolla seemed worse; she was feverish and restless, and called incessantly for her mother. With the evening she came again. I was not on night duty, so I had but a few words with her before I left the ward. When I reached the house I was informed that a gentleman had been to see me, and, hearing I would be in shortly, had promised to call again. I felt a little nervous, being sure that it was Mary's husband who had called.

The event proved that I was right—he was ushered in shortly after I had finished tea, and I rose to greet him with evident perturbation. He was still very pale, and had a harassed weary look that made me compassionate him.

"I trust you will excuse my calling on you," he said. "You were a witness of my meeting with my wife this morning. It was totally unexpected. I am ignorant of her place of abode. I do not wish to know it so long as she is averse to my doing so, only I thought, perhaps, I could befriend her through you. Is she in want? She looks sadly altered. Pray tell me what you know of her, madam."

I could not resist his appeal. What need to do so? I bade him sit down, and

told him all I knew of Mary and the child. I never saw a man so broken down in my life as he was when he heard that sad history. That Lolla still lived seemed to relieve him from a great dread, for Mary's words that morning had alarmed him terribly, and all through the day he had been haunted by the idea that his child was dead—that he had taken her life in that moment of frenzy.

"Can't I see her?" he entreated—"only once. Oh, madam, pray let me see her. Not when her mother is there—she need not know. But some time when you are on duty—pray, pray let me!"

"She will not know you," I said, remembering the child's words when she said her prayers to me.

"Not know me? No; of course she would have forgotten," he said faintly; "but do you think Mary has never spoken to her of me?"

"I fear not," I answered.

He covered his face with his hands. "I am justly punished," he said slowly.

I sat there in silence waiting till he should be calm once more. He turned his white face to me at last.

"—Is there anything I can do?" he asked eagerly. "Does she need anything? I have money."

I shook my head sorrowfully.

"She has all she needs," I said; "everything that human skill and care can do for her is being done. But I fear that it is beyond human skill to keep that little blighted life with us."

His head sank on his hands once more. "May God forgive me!" he groaned in his agony.

Night in the ward once more. Days have come and gone since Lolla's father heard of his child's fate, and with each day she grows weaker and worse. Her mother is almost always with her now. In extreme cases such permission is always granted. To-night I have acceded to the father's petition. He is to come for an hour. Mary is not expected till nine, and at eight I told him to be here.

We have not many patients in this ward now, and Lolla's cot is in a corner by itself. The little thing is lying there more like a waxen image than ever—the eyes closed, her placid hands folded above her breast, her soft breathing alone showing that life is lingering still in the weak and pain-racked frame.

She lies so when her father comes in and

stands beside her. I see how he catches his breath; how his lips quiver. He bends over the little motionless figure; and softly touches one wee white hand. The child opens her languid eyes and looks at him. She sees many strange faces, and in her mind they are all more or less associated with pain. She turns to me. "Is it dotters?" she asks.

"No, darling; not doctors," I answered. "It is Lolla's father come to see her. Won't she kiss him, and tell him she is glad to see him?"

The dark eyes grow more wistful and bewildered. "Lolla has no father," she says, with a little sorrowful shake of the pretty curly head so like his own. "Mother says so; mother knows."

A choking sob burst from the man's lips. He knelt down beside the cot and buried his head in the snowy coverlet.

"Poor man! don't cry," said the child pityingly; "Lolla is sorry for you. Are you some other little girl's father? Lolla has none."

"Yes, dear, Lolla has," I whispered, raising her on my arm, "and he is very sorry for Lolla and has come to see her. Won't she be kind to him and kiss him?"

She shook her head. "Mother always says Lolla has no father," she reiterated; "mother would not say it if it wasn't true. But I will kiss the poor man, if he likes. Why does he cry?"

I thought then, and I think still, that such a moment as this might have expiated even a worse crime than his. No wonder he wept; no wonder that his heart seemed broken as he looked at the little fragile blossom God had sent him from heaven, and on which he had bestowed neither thought nor care nor culture. And now it was too late! No tears, no prayers, no efforts of human love or human skill could keep her here on earth, and while he knelt there, broken down and desolate, her baby lips stabbed him with a cruel and unconscious truth, and brought him face to face with the folly and the sin of his own misspent youth.

There was silence in the ward. The children and the nurses moved noiselessly to and fro. I drew a screen around that corner, and moved softly away. Perhaps he could explain to his child something of what was in his heart, though I knew it was beyond his power to bring that longed-for word from her lips. What did she know, or what need had she, of any father? Was she not "Mother's Lolla" only?

An hour had passed. I was expecting Mary Kennedy every moment. I went behind the screen to tell him he had better leave now, but the sight I saw stayed the words on my lips. The child's head was pillowed on his breast, his arms were around her, and she had fallen asleep.

He looked at me appealingly.

"I dare not lay her down for fear of waking her," he said.

Even as he spoke the screen was moved aside by a quick touch, and before him stood his wife. She made one hurried step forward—her face flushed hotly. I touched her arm and spoke. "For the child's sake!" I whispered.

She turned away for an instant and covered her face with her hands.

Presently she recovered her composure, and took off her bonnet and shawl as usual. I told her of the surgeon's last report. I wished I could have made it more hopeful. I saw the anguish in her eyes, the quiver of the poor pale lips, but she neither spoke nor wept now.

It was a strange pathetic scene; the strangeness and sadness of it all came home to me with a curious pain and regret. They might all have been so happy, and yet by the man's own rashness and folly the three lives were ruined and desolate now.

They did not speak to each other for long. It was the father who broke the painful silence at last.

"You never told her of me," he said, half reproachfully.

She raised her dark sad eyes, and looked calmly at him.

"What need?" she said curtly. "Were you ever a father to her save in name?"

A deep, shamed flush rose to his brow. He bent his head over the golden curls.

"You would forgive me if you knew what I feel now," he said brokenly, "when I see all that I have lost—too late! Will you do one thing for me, Mary? I—I will not trouble you again. Tell her that I am indeed her father. She does not believe me."

A flash of triumph lit the girl's dark eyes.

"No," she said; "I am all to her. I resolved it should be so. What have you ever done for her that deserved a thought of love—a prayer of gratitude?"

"At least, she is my child, too," he said wistfully.

"Does nature speak at last?" asked his wife bitterly. "She was your child when you denied her the food she so sorely

needed! She was your child when your step brought terror to her baby-heart! She was your child when you broke her mother's heart, and turned her life to one long fierce despair! She was your child when your brutal blow crippled her little limbs! She is your child—yes, but I gave her life, and you—you have brought death as your gift. How can I forgive you? I am less your wife than her mother. It is beyond my strength."

He raised his haggard face and looked at her.

"I see it is," he said; "I asked too much; I never thought of what I had done, till to-night."

His eyes fell on the little waxen face—the closed lids, the pale lips through which the faint breath scarcely stole.

One deep hoarse sob burst from his lips. He laid the child down and turned away.

The mother bent over the little sleeper. A faint cry escaped her lips:

"Nurse!"

I came forward directly. I, too, saw the change. So soon it had come after all.

"She has fainted," I said.

For a little while we restored her to her senses, and the languid eyes opened on her mother's face. Yet she seemed restless; her lips moved, she strove to speak, but the effort seemed beyond her strength.

"What is it, darling?" her mother whispered. "Can mother get you anything?"

She turned her head aside in that little restless way of hers.

"Is it—is it——" she lisped faintly.

"Is it what, my precious one?"

"Is it—father?"

The wistful eyes looked up for answer—dumbly—appealingly.

I saw the struggle going on within the woman's breast.

She raised her head and met the anguished entreaty of her husband's eyes. Her husband! Had she not said she would give him that name no more, that forgiveness was beyond her strength?

"Is it?" urged the faint voice.

How much fainter it was now!

Then, low and distinct, came at last the answer, for which he listened with such breathless dread:

"Yes!"

A smile broke over the beautiful little face.

"I am so glad!" she said softly. "I told him I would ask you. Where is he? I want him!"

She made a sign, and the young man came from his shadowy corner and knelt beside her. The child looked at him earnestly for a moment, then took his hand in her little waxen fingers.

"Father!" she whispered faintly. "You are my father—she says so—I wish I had known you before—I can't get well, now. The doctors said so. They thought I did not hear them, but I did. Mother will miss Lolla; she is going like that other little girl who slept there. I thought I should be able to run about again. But you must take mother where the daisies grow—and be very good to her—won't you?"

He could not speak for the sobs that rose in his throat; every little halting word seemed to stab him like a dagger.

But for him she might be well and strong now, running about in the daisied grass of which she spoke!

But the mother shed no tears, she seemed in a passive despair that held her dumb and powerless, counting, with eager greed, the moments that spared her child to her still.

There was a long silence, broken only by the man's stifled sobs.

Once more the sweet baby-voice was heard.

"Are you so sorry for me, father? Why did you not come before? I was well once—I could run about like other little children. But I am tired now—very tired. I do not think I even care to get well—I am so tired of lying here."

"Lolla does not want to leave mother, does she?" asked the poor young desolate creature by her side, to whom these words came as a fiat of doom too terrible to bear.

"No," said the child, clinging more closely to that fond and faithful shelter which had been her only home. "But nurse said God knows best. He loves little children, too; and in heaven no one is lame any more!"

There was no answer. What could they say? To the child the exchange would be only one of glory and happiness. To them—what need to picture it? Soon, only too soon, the dread would be realised to its fullest extent.

"I am so tired!" said the child, presently, with a faint sigh.

I stepped hurriedly forward. Too well I knew that grey unearthly pallor spreading over the waxen face. Her eyes closed, then opened once more.

"Father's Lolla, too!" she said.

Then a smile of unearthly radiance flitted over her face. She glanced up at me, as I bent anxiously over her.

"Good-night, nurse," she whispered faintly; "good-night, mother! I am—going to sleep."

To sleep? Yes, but never again on earth, or to those who weep around her here, will "Mother's Lolla" wake.

Shall I say more? Shall I tell how, by the child's death-bed, those long divided hearts were reconciled? How, in after years came peace and hope to the poor tortured mother's heart; or how the father, receiving a baptism of purity from those baby-lips, lived to be a good, and great, and honourable man?

I think there is no need. With Lolla my story began; with Lolla let it end!

OLD LADY CORK.

It is curious to think that little over forty years ago there was flourishing an animated old lady, giving "Sunday parties" in New Burlington Street, who could tell stories about Dr. Johnson, whom she had met in society some sixty years before. This remarkable woman retained her ardour for company and the enjoyments of life to the last, and competed with Lady Morgan and Lydia White for her share of such "lions" as might be roaring or stalking about town.

Mr. Luttrell, the wit, likened her to a shuttlecock, because she was all "cork and feathers," an indifferent conceit; while others speculated on her vast age in somewhat unfeeling fashion. The late Mr. Croker, who had a morbid penchant for convicting women of suppression on this point—in them a not unpardonable failing—made some investigations into the question of her age, apropos of a dinner to which she had invited him. In 1835 he wrote: "The Hon. Mary Monckton, born April, 1746. Lodge's Peerage dates her birth 1737; but this is a mistake, for an elder sister of the same name, now in her eighty-ninth year, Lady Cork, still entertains and enjoys society with extraordinary health, spirits, and vivacity." In July, 1836, he puts down that "she wrote to me the following lively note: 'I would rather be a hundred, because you and many other agreeable people would come to me as a wonder. The fact is, I am only verging on ninety. I wish the business of the nation may not

prevent your giving me the pleasure of your company at dinner on Wednesday the 3rd, at a quarter before eight. It is in vain, I suppose, to expect you at my tea-drinking on Friday, the 5th, or in the evening of the 3rd, in the event of your not being able to dine with me on that day."

This pleasantly-turned invitation—so amazing for its freshness and even grace—suggests to the critic that there is only "one mark of anility" in the whole, viz., that she did not remember he was out of Parliament and out of office at the time; a fact not of so much importance after all, and which younger folk might not have kept in mind.

"I found," he says, "by the Register of St. James's parish, that she had understated her age by one year."

Of her proceedings in the pursuit of lions, and her art in collecting and making them perform, some very diverting stories are told.

She took a great fancy to Mr. Thomas Moore, then in the zenith of popularity; and one evening took it into her head to gratify her guests with some passages of dramatic reading. "Mr. Moore was the medium selected for this 'flow of soul,' upon which it seemed the lady had set her heart, but against which it proved he had set his face: he was exceedingly sorry—was particularly engaged—had besides a very bad cold—a terribly obstinate hoarseness; and declared all this with an exceedingly 'good-evening' expression of countenance. Her ladyship was puzzled how to act, until 'Monk' Lewis came to her relief; and in a short time she made her appearance with a large Burgundy pitch-plaster, with which she followed the wandering melodist about the room, who in his endeavours to evade his well-meaning pursuer and her formidable recipe, was at length fairly hemmed into a corner."

More droll, however, was the following incident, contrived by the same agreeable farceur:

The vivacious countess determined to have a charitable lottery, combined with some shape of entertainment, and consulted her friend on it. "Under his direction the whole affair was managed. As it was arranged that everybody was to win something, Lewis took care that the prizes should be of a nature that would create the most ludicrous perplexity to their owners. Gentlemen were seen in every direction, running about with teapots in their hands, or trays under their arms,

endeavouring to find some sly corner in which to deposit their prizes; while young ladies were sinking beneath the weight, or the shame, of carrying a coal-scuttle or a flat-iron. Guinea-pigs, birds in cages, punch-bowls, watchmen's rattles, and Dutch-ovens, were perplexing their fortunate, or, as perhaps they considered themselves, unfortunate proprietors; and Lady Cork's raffle was long remembered by those who were present as a scene of laughter and confusion."

Long after, when Mrs. Gore, the novelist, then in the height of her popularity, brought out *The Dowager*, the character was instantly recognised as a portrait of Lady Cork, whose death had just taken place. Mrs. Gore thus wrote to her friend Lady Morgan:

"You are very kind to like my new book. Till you praised it, I was in despair. It sells, and I was convinced of its utter worthlessness; for surely nothing can equal the degradation of the public taste in such matters! The subject and title were of Bentley's choosing; and my part distinctly was to avoid hooking 'M.C.O.' into the book. In certain mannerisms *The Dowager* may resemble her; but not in essentials. She was better or worse."

What an amiable disclaimer! Lady Morgan's comment in a diary on the poor old lady's death, which took place in 1840, is that she died "full of bitterness and good dinners."

The truth was there could be little respect for the exhibition of this craze for society at such an advanced age. It was curious that there should have been three old ladies with the same mania—Lady Cork, Lady Morgan, and Lydia White.

One of the most graceful of Sir Joshua's portraits represents the lady in a dreaming pastoral attitude, seated in a garden half stooping forward, her arm reclined on a pedestal beside her, a dog at her feet. A few days before her death, Mr. Redding met her at dinner, when he noticed that she was well able to ascend from the dining-room like other ladies, leaning on a friend's arm.

"She invited to her house men of all creeds and parties, because their opinions had nothing to do in sharing her hospitalities. The peculiar circumstances attending her marriage were well known, at least in contemporary life. It would be unfair to judge her by the last score or two of years that she lived. My impression is that she had at no time superior mental

attainments to other ladies in the circles of fashion, where youth and vivacity never fail to be attractive. She had some eccentricities, and I am inclined to think she was not of an amiable disposition, because she did not disguise her distaste of children, and this is a good criterion for judging of female character. To more advanced youth she was a torment in employing it for her various purposes. There were two sweet girls in their 'teens,' whose visits to town were few and far between, and had, therefore, little time for sight-seeing. She would drive to them in their lodgings of a forenoon, with a list of names, and occupy them with writing her notes of invitation until dinner time, knowing perfectly well how they were situated. I advised that they should not be 'at home,' for the exaction was unjustifiable. Sidney Smith admirably developed her character under another head, when he made a species of allegory of her conduct, illustrative of that of the bishops towards the deans and chapters. His friend, Lady Cork, told him she was so deeply moved at his charity sermon, that she 'borrowed' a sovereign of someone going out of church and put it into the plate. All the world knew her propensity for carrying off anything upon which she chanced to lay her hands. 'Don't leave those things about so, my dear, or I shall steal them,' was, perhaps, said for her. She called one morning on Rogers the poet, and found he had gone out, when she carried off most of the best flowers upon which he was choice. The poet of the epigrammatic month could not forgive her for a good while, and the distance lasted nearly a whole year, when she wrote to him, that they were both very old, that he ought to forget and forgive, and closed her note with an invitation to dinner the next day. Rogers wrote her that he 'would come, dine, sup, and breakfast with her,' and thus their quarrel, which at their age Lady Cork called ridiculous, was made up."

Let us now look back sixty years to the "Blue Stocking" days when Boswell sets before us a picture of himself and the lady with some of his happiest touches.

"Johnson was prevailed with to come sometimes into these circles, and did not think himself too grave even for the lively Miss Monckton (now Countess of Cork), who used to have the finest bit of blue at the house of her mother, Lady Galway. Her vivacity enchanted the sage, and they used to talk together with all imaginable

ease. A singular instance happened one evening, when she insisted that some of Sterne's writings were very pathetic. Johnson bluntly denied it. 'I am sure,' said she, 'they have affected me.' 'Why,' said Johnson, smiling and rolling himself about, 'that is because, dearest, you're a dunce.' When she sometime afterwards mentioned this to him, he said, with equal truth and politeness, 'Madam, if I had thought so, I certainly should not have said it.'

"Another evening Johnson's kind indulgence towards me had a pretty difficult trial. I had dined at the Duke of Montrose's with a very agreeable party; and his grace, according to his usual custom, had circulated the bottle very freely. Lord Graham and I went together to Miss Monckton's, where I certainly was in extraordinary spirits, and above all fear or awe. In the midst of a great number of persons of the first rank, amongst whom I recollect, with confusion, a noble lady of the most stately decorum, I placed myself next to Johnson, and thinking myself now fully his match, talked to him in a loud and boisterous manner, desirous to let the company know how I could contend with Ajax. I particularly remember pressing him upon the value of the pleasures of the imagination, and, as an illustration of my argument, asking him, 'What, sir, supposing I were to fancy that the — (naming the most charming duchess in his majesty's dominions) were in love with me, should I not be very happy?' My friend with much address evaded my interrogatories, and kept me as quiet as possible; but it may easily be conceived how he must have felt.* However, when a few

"* Next day I endeavoured to give what had happened the most ingenious turn I could by the following verses :

"TO THE HONOURABLE MISS MONCKTON.

"Not that with th' excellent Montrose

I had the happiness to dine ;

Not that I late from table rose,

From Graham's wit, from generous wine.

"It was not these alone which led

On sacred manners to encroach ;

And made me feel what most I dread,

Johnson's just frown, and self-reproach.

"But when I enter'd not abash'd,

From your bright eyes were shot such rays,

At once intoxication flash'd,

And all my frame was in a blaze !

"But not a brilliant blaze, I own ;

Of the dull smoke I'm yet ashamed ;

I was a dreary ruin grown,

And not enlighten'd, though inflamed.

"Victim at once to wine and love,

I hope, Maria, you'll forgive :

While I invoke the Powers above

That henceforth I may wiser live."

days afterwards I waited upon him and made an apology, he behaved with the most friendly gentleness."

THE QUESTION OF CAIN.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

CHAPTER XXXIII. TIDED OVER.

CHESNEY MANOR had no great architectural beauty to boast of; the old house lacked the stateliness which so fitly distinguished the *ci-devant* Charlecote Chase. It was a long, low, rambling building, originally of not more than half its present dimensions, to which several successive owners had added, each according to his own requirements and his own taste. The result was a roomy, comfortable, unaccountable sort of a house, with haphazard doors, quaint and independent windows, and unexpected staircases. The prevailing tint of the house was grey, but the walls were almost concealed by climbing plants, and the wide terrace on which it stood was divided from the park and the lake by a balustrade of red brick, with a wide coping, and almost covered by a luxuriant Virginia-creeper, which was famous in all that part of the country. The park was extensive and effectively laid out, and the gardens were large and of the old-fashioned order. The manor was essentially a quiet place; there was nothing precisely shabby about the house or its furniture, but neither was there anything new or fashionable. An air of staidness and order pervaded the place, and the stability of a family firmly fixed in the respect of the people seemed to be conveyed by the physiognomy of Chesney Manor.

Mrs. Masters was so happy to find herself in her old house again, surrounded by the soulless things that were so full of meaning and memory to her, and in the society of her brother to whom she was strongly attached, that she cheered up as she had never expected to do during her dreaded separation from her husband. There were many old places and old friends to visit; she and John would have much to go back upon together; the memory of the past and the dead was dear to them both; her brother was little changed during her long absence; no one had come to occupy the place she had left vacant, in the old-familiar rooms where she and John had passed their childhood. She would have been at Chesney Manor a month sooner, but for the troublesome

accident that had detained her in Paris, and kept Mr. Warrender with her. She felt envious of the good fortune of her children and their governess, who had been sent on in advance, and had enjoyed all the early autumnal beauty which she was too late to see in its perfection.

The largest and the handsomest room in Mr. Warrender's house was the library; his books were the treasures that he most highly prized, and as the taste was hereditary, they were nobly lodged. The four lofty windows on the ground-floor to the left of the wide portico of the main entrance, belonged to the library, which occupied a similar extent in the left angle of the house. From the front windows a beautiful view of the park and the lake was to be had; those of the side looked into a smooth bowling-green with a fine orchard beyond it, and an intervening settlement of beehives.

In winter and summer alike the library was a cheerful room, and there we find Mrs. Masters installed one day, very shortly after her arrival at Chesney Manor, and in confidential conversation with her children's governess. The latter is a young lady of youthful but grave aspect, with beautiful grey eyes in which there is a most attractive mingling of trustfulness and timidity, a very fair complexion, just a little too pale for complete beauty, and a slender graceful figure. She is seated by the side of Mrs. Masters's couch, which is drawn up close to one of the front windows; a small squat Algerian-table stands at her feet covered with papers, and she holds with both her hands a large photograph, at which she is looking with eyes dimmed by tears. Sweet and grateful tears they are; for this girl, on whose youthfulness a shadow of gravity has fallen, is Helen Rhodes, and the photograph in her hands represents her father's tomb in the English burying ground at Chundrapore. Into the safe haven of Mrs. Masters's protection, extended with glad and generous alacrity, has the orphan daughter of the English chaplain, whose last deliberate act was one of compassion, been brought. The papers before her have just reached Mrs. Masters from Chundrapore, and she is telling Helen how she had written to her after the death of Herbert Rhodes, enclosing the photograph of the tomb, but had not had any acknowledgment, and how, after a long interval, the packet was returned to her through the post-office.

"We knew Miss Jerdane's address,"

continued Mrs. Masters, "so I wrote to you at the Hill House. It would have been wiser to have addressed my letter to the care of the lawyer, but I did not think of that. Miss Jerdane had, of course, left England before my letter reached the Hill House, and nobody there knew anything about you. They naturally refused to take it in, and so it was returned to me. Colonel Masters and I were very much distressed about it, and I always intended to apply to the lawyers on my arrival in London."

"You mean papa's lawyers, Messrs. Simpson and Rees, who sent me his letters," said Helen. "They did not know anything about me, I think. I did write to them once, when I was in Paris, but not to tell them anything, only to ask a question."

"So that I should have failed again. When I heard the good news from Madame Morrison, by what some people, I suppose, would call an accident, I wrote at once to ask Colonel Masters to send me the photograph and the letter, and now, after many days, you have them."

"The one as precious as the other. I have so much to thank you for that I am unable to thank you at all. How well I remember the vain longing I used to feel to see someone who had known my father, and how I wished for the sake of that that I had gone out to Chundrapore, even when it would have been too late. To think that I did not even know your name!"

"And that I might never have found you; that I might have passed alongside of you and missed you, as Gabriel missed Evangeline, if it had not been that my brother chanced to come in while Madame Morrison was with me, and asked her about the pretty young lady whom he had seen 'rehearsing.' Of course you know, Helen, he had no notion of what you were really doing, but took you for a bride-elect."

"It was a fortunate day for me," said Helen, striving to hide the trouble into which she was thrown by Mrs. Masters's words—the speaker felt them to be thoughtless as soon as she had uttered them; "I can never merit the happy fate it has brought me."

She spoke in a tone of simple conviction, and Mrs. Masters, looking at her attentively, saw peace and serenity in her face.

"That is a healed heart," she thought; "and what an innocent one!"

"Oh yes, you can," said she briskly. "You are an excellent friend for the children, and a dutiful elder daughter to

me already; and, my dear, how like your father you are sometimes. Not always."

Here Mrs. Masters raised herself on her couch, and looked out of the window in the direction of the park.

"I see my brother and the children," she said. "They are going to the hazel-copse, no doubt. How strong they grow in the English air."

"They were so well while you were away," said Helen. "Not even nurse could make out that Maggie was pale, or Maud 'dawny,' as she says."

"By-the-bye," said Mrs. Masters, settling down again among her cushions, "I wonder whether nurse thought it odd that you did not go outside the grounds, after the accident to Tippoo Sahib?"

"I don't think so; the grounds are so large and the village is so dull, and every other place is beyond a walk. I thought it was the only safety."

Helen said this in an anxious questioning tone.

"Of course it was. You were quite right. If I had had the least notion of who was at Horndean I should not have sent you to England before me; but I had not. I have been so long away, and my brother is so silent about his neighbours' affairs—indeed, so unobservant of them—that I did not know, and he did not tell me anything about the people there. I remember Mr. Horndean, a quiet, stiff old gentleman, with a risen-from-the-ranks look and manner, and I remember a magnificent Miss Lorton, who barely condescended to recognise my existence in the old time before Colonel Masters appeared on the scene; but I never heard of her after I left England, or if I did I had quite forgotten her. When Madame Morrison told me the story of your being taken up by a friend of your father's, and made so miserable by the man's wife, it never occurred to me that Mrs. Townley Gore was the Miss Lorton of my former acquaintance, and that you could be placed in any difficulty by living at Chesney Manor. It was not until you wrote and told me of the state of the case that I heard of old Mr. Horndean's death. My brother had not mentioned it, and neither he nor I know anything of Mr. Lorton. But I am not sure, unless you had objected very strongly yourself, that we should have thought it a reason why you should not come to Chesney. We have always agreed with Madame Morrison that it would be well you should be formally

reconciled with Mr. and Mrs. Townley Gore, especially as you do not want any favour from them, and as you acknowledge that he meant kindly to you."

"Indeed he did," said Helen, "and I was very much to blame."

Mrs. Masters laid her hand with maternal kindness on the girl's fair bended head, as she said :

"There is nothing I have observed about you, Helen, that I love better than the frankness of your admission of that. We will speak of it no more, but I take it into account in considering the present circumstances. While I was away and you were here alone, you were perfectly right in avoiding the possibility of encountering Mr. or Mrs. Townley Gore ; it would have been very awkward and unpleasant ; but now that I am here, and it is in the nature of things that we should meet, I do not think you ought to avoid them. What I propose is, that I should tell them, when they call on me, that you are with me, and how it came about. You may be quite sure that Mrs. Townley Gore is too clever not to take the cue that I shall give her by my manner of speaking of you, and also that if she does not take it, she will lay herself open to having a large piece of my mind administered to her with polite frankness."

"She will think me very fortunate ; far, far happier than I deserve."

"Perhaps so ; she took such pains to make you wretched that it would be a contradiction in human nature if she could be glad to know that you are happy and well cared for ; but she will keep her feelings to herself ; the matter will be passed over smoothly, and no doubt Mr. Townley Gore will be sincerely glad to see you. The position has its awkwardness, but that will soon be got over, for they are sure not to stay long in the country, and we shall be here all the winter. So," added Mrs. Masters, in the tone in which one closes a discussion, "it is agreed that I prepare Mrs. Townley Gore for seeing you, and that you meet her as if nothing particular had happened."

"Yes," said Helen submissively ; "but suppose she tells you I am a wicked, base, ungrateful girl, and that she refuses to see me ?"

"In that case, Helen, I shall inform her, very politely, that I do not believe her. Take away your treasures, my dear, and remember that no one and nothing can ever counteract the effect of your own perfect candour with me, or shake my resolution

to befriend to the uttermost the child of Herbert Rhodes. Now go ; I have to write to my husband."

Helen left her and went to her own room—a pleasant, spacious chamber, with old-fashioned chintz furniture, and from whose deep bay-windows the woods of Horndean, and the widely-spreading shrubbery of Chesney Manor, severed from its neighbour only by a sunk fence and a railing, were visible. An old-fashioned bureau stood between the windows, and had from the first been selected by Helen for the safe keeping of all her little treasures. She put away the photograph of her father's tomb in one of the drawers, and placed the letter from Mrs. Masters, that would have been so great a help to her if it had reached her according to the writer's intention, in the blue-velvet bon-bon box. Her father's letters—those which had been sent to her by Messrs. Simpson and Rees, in obedience to his instructions—and the letter which Frank Lisle had left for her, were in the box. She had often taken out Frank's letter and asked herself whether she ought not to destroy it. Its writer had deserted her ; the phase of her life with which he was concerned was over and done with for ever ; the page was closed, and even if she could, she now knew that she would not reopen it ; would it not be wiser that she should destroy this one remaining record of what had been ? Yes, it would be wiser, and some day she would destroy it, but not just yet. And then she heard the children's voices in the hall below, and she replaced the box, locked the bureau, and went downstairs.

That same afternoon the event anticipated by Mrs. Masters took place. Mr. and Mrs. Townley Gore called upon their neighbours at Chesney Manor. They found Mr. Warrender and his sister in the library, and the first civilities having been interchanged, the quartette divided itself, and while Mr. Warrender and Mr. Townley Gore discussed sport and local news, Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Townley Gore talked rather laboriously of Horndean, the changes that had taken place during Mrs. Masters's absence, and the plans of the respective households for the winter.

Mrs. Townley Gore presented to Mrs. Masters a rather curious subject of observation. Her good looks, her self-possession, her self-satisfaction, her air of assured prosperity, as of one beyond the reach of the darts of fate, all made an impression upon a woman who, although remarkably

sensible and self-controlled, possessed a lofty and sensitive mind, and was solicitous for those whom she loved, and dependent for happiness upon the interior rather than the exterior of things. Knowing what she knew of her, and feeling with each minute of their interview, and every sentence that Mrs. Townley Gore uttered, a growing inclination to tell her that she knew it, Mrs. Masters's imagination was easily reconstructing Helen's experiences, as she listened to the smooth tones in which the conventional phrases were uttered.

She was just wondering when the conversation would take such a turn as might enable her to introduce Helen's name, and thinking that an enquiry for her children on the part of her visitor would probably furnish her with an opportunity, when Mrs. Townley Gore's attention was attracted by a water-colour drawing on an easel near her.

"Your copper-beech is a great favourite," she said; "and deservedly so. It is the finest in the county, I believe. I am the happy possessor of a portrait of it, and I see there is one nearly finished. I suppose you have heard to what an extent my brother's friend, Mr. Frank Lisle, profited this summer by Mr. Warrender's kind permission to us to make our guests free of Chesney Park."

"Mr. Frank Lisle? No, I never heard of him."

"I am very sorry that I cannot bring him to make his acknowledgments in person; you and Mr. Warrender could not fail to be pleased with his appreciation of the beauties of Chesney. We found my brother's artist-friend a great acquisition during the summer; he is very amusing, and immensely in earnest about his painting. He was constantly running over to Chesney to draw something or other, and he was particularly proud of his success with the copper-beech."

"Is Mr. Lisle at Horndean now?"

"No, I am sorry to say he is not. He is going to Italy for the winter, and my brother joins him in London in a day or two. He will miss Mr. Lisle very much; they have been friends and travelling companions for a long time."

This topic interested Mrs. Masters; she led Mrs. Townley Gore to talk of her brother, of his illness and absence at the time of Mr. Horndean's death, and of Mr. Lisle's having taken care of him, and returned to England with him. When she

had heard all that Mrs. Townley Gore had to say on these points, she began to wish for the departure of her visitors; she needed to be alone, she had something to think of. She had changed her mind about making mention of Helen; she would postpone that for the present. It was only by an effort that she could attend to what Mrs. Townley Gore said, afterwards, of her brother's regret that he could not accompany her to Chesney Manor, and his intention of calling there on the following day; of their imminent removal to London, and intention of returning to Horndean in the spring.

When Mr. Warrender returned to the library, after seeing Mrs. Townley Gore to her carriage, he found his sister looking perplexed. She asked him abruptly:

"Do you know much of Mr. Horndean? What was he doing before the old man died?"

"I know very little about him," answered Mr. Warrender, "and most of that by hearsay. I believe he was an unsatisfactory sort of person enough, until he had it made worth his while to be respectable, but I have no personal knowledge of the facts. Mrs. Townley Gore used to be said to keep her brother dark; she never talked of him to me."

"He was not likely to have very reputable friends and companions, I suppose?"

"Hardly; but this young artist, Mr. Lisle, seems to be a pleasant, clever, harmless fellow. I wish he had stayed a little longer, he would have liked to have seen the things we brought home from Italy. By-the-bye, you did not spring your mine upon Mrs. Townley Gore. You said nothing about Miss Rhodes. Why did you change your mind? Were you frightened, when it came to the point? Don't mind admitting it, if you were," added Mr. Warrender, smiling, "for I should be entirely of your way of thinking, if I had ever intended to say anything even constructively unpleasant to Mrs. Townley Gore."

"No, no; I was not afraid," answered his sister, with a little confusion which confirmed him in his belief that she was. "It was not that; but when I found that they were going away on Wednesday, and there could be no risk of their meeting Helen, or hearing anything about her, I thought it would be quite useless and unnecessary to mention her. When they come back it will be time enough, and the reprieve will be acceptable to her, I have no doubt."

Mr. Warrender accepted the explanation—although his own inclination would have been to get an unpleasant business over as promptly as possible—and left Mrs. Masters to her reflections. These were perplexing. She could not resist the conviction that Helen had been exposed to the risk of meeting the man who had deceived and deserted her, under circumstances which would have combined every element of disaster to her peace and her fair fame. She could not doubt that the artist, Frank Lisle, who accompanied Frederick Lorton to Horndean, was identical with the artist, Frank Lisle, who forbade Helen to mention his name to Mrs. Townley Gore, lest she might get a clue to his "friend," who was in that lady's black books; and that the "friend" was Mrs. Townley Gore's brother, now restored to her favour by the potent interposition of prosperity. Was this man's desertion of Helen connected with that revolution in the fortunes of his friend? She recalled the circumstances, as Mrs. Townley Gore related them, she compared the dates, and she arrived at the conclusion that Frederick Lorton's illness, and the devoted attendance on him, that led to Frank Lisle's position as *l'ami de la maison* at Horndean, were synchronous incidents. The man was a baser creature than even she and Madame Morrison had judged him to be, that was all. The protection of which he had robbed the orphan girl, the one resource to which he well knew she never would resort, was that of the Townley Gores, and it was by them and their position that he was profiting; this gay-hearted, careless, happy young artist, who was such a favourite with everybody. She could not help thinking what a thunder-clap it would have been for him had he and Helen met, and almost regretting that the encounter had not befallen; but she remembered that to Helen it would have been a thunderbolt and fatal.

It took Mrs. Masters some time to make up her mind that she would not say a word of all this to Helen. The danger was over, it might never recur; if it threatened, Mrs. Masters would find a way to avert it; she could not throw Helen back into the fever of mind that she had been so hard bested by. The man was out of the way, and silence was safest and best. When she summoned

Helen, and the girl came, trembling, to learn what had passed, and she witnessed her thankfulness, her relief, her simple acquiescence in the infallibility of her friend's judgment, Mrs. Masters congratulated herself that an extraordinary complication in a difficult affair was safely tided over. That portion of Helen's story in which Frank Lisle was concerned, was the only secret which Mrs. Masters had ever kept from her brother. She had not hesitated to conceal the facts from him for Helen's sake, because her own absolute conviction of the girl's perfect innocence satisfied her that no breach of faith was involved in the concealment. Had she not chosen Helen as a companion for her own children? How heartily she now congratulated herself that Mr. Warrender knew nothing of the matter. What complications might arise if he knew the truth? What indeed?

Helen was very bright and happy that evening, almost as gay as the children themselves, and Mr. Warrender, remarking the beauty of her smile, and the melody of her laughter, approved of the decision to which his sister had come. He had few dislikes, but Mrs. Townley Gore was the object of one of them: perhaps it was the unconscious influence of this feeling that made him find Helen more interesting than he had ever imagined a girl could be, even interesting enough to beguile him from his books at unlikely hours.

The party at Horndean broke up, and the house was deserted, while the little group at Chesney Manor settled down to a peaceful and enjoyable life. Mr. Horndean and Mr. Warrender had not chanced to meet, nor did Mrs. Masters see Mr. Horndean before he went up to town. He called at Chesney Manor on the day after his sister's visit, but Mr. Warrender was out, and Mrs. Masters had not left her room. As he was riding homewards by a short cut, where there was a bridle path through a wood, he caught sight of two little girls in a field on the Chesney Manor side of the railing. The children were tossing a ball, and a little white dog was following it, lamely. At some distance he perceived a lady, seated on a fallen tree; from her attitude he concluded she was reading.

"The Masters children, I suppose," said Mr. Horndean to himself, "and Frank's four-legged patient."

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